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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE MEMOIRS OF COUNT WITTE. Translated and Edited by Abraham Yarmolinski. Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company.

"The most intelligent man in Russia," the German Emperor is reported to have said of Count Witte. "The only intelligent man in Russia!" the reader of these memoirs will be tempted to exclaim. Certainly Witte, as self-portrayed in these pages, is a man not only of shrewd judgment, but of boundless self-confidence. He is comparatively little influenced by the opinions of other people, does not care what they think of him, reverences no one save the deceased Czar Alexander III. At the same time he bluntly claims all the credit that is his due. "I hope that financial history will acknowledge the fact that never did Russian credit stand higher in both domestic and international money markets than at the time when I was Minister of Finances. It was not my fault that our military adventures have so thoroughly injured our credit." Such declarations occur more than once. "I have succeeded in achieving a good deal, for during my administration I doubled the railroad mileage. It is noteworthy that the Ministry of War was constantly thwarting my efforts." The tone is characteristic.

He is no less blunt, and no less assured, in his estimates of others. The Czar, Nicholas, was lamentably lacking in will power; his character "may be said to be essentially feminine." The Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich, while sometimes pretending to liberalism, was really in favor of an autocracy of the most unlimited and arbitrary character. "He is a mean-spirited and unbalanced man." As for the nobles, the majority of them are, politically, "a mass of degenerate humanity, which recognizes nothing but the gratification of its selfish interests and lusts." The people are guided not by reason, but by all manner of mystic impulses. Most Russians in public life can be credited with little character and even less intellect. Trepov was "a man with the broad education of a military commander and the shallow opinions of an unsophisticated corporal." Of Stolypin it is said that "unfortunately his heart was neither in his head nor in his breast. He possessed both temperament and courage, but he lacked moral stamina. As a result he demoralized and debased all the elements of Russian political life with which he came in contact." But severe as are these comments upon prominent figures, they are scarcely so quelling as Witte's brief thumbnail sketches of his lesser contemporaries. Bulygin, for example, is put down as "an upright, apathetic statesman, of mediocre intellect." These opinions are pronounced with all the assurance of history.

In short, Witte, though a liberal statesman, writes, so to speak, autocratically.

Sergey Yulyevich Witte was born in the year 1849 in the city of Tiflis. His father was of Dutch descent; his mother was the daughter of a Russian Princess. The boy was under the care of a succession of tutors, from whom he learned little; later at the gymnasium he "played hooky most of the time." Until his seventeenth year he might have seemed destined to become an idle and more or less worthless aristocrat of the familiar type. But in that year, he says, "it suddenly dawned upon me that neither I nor my brother was doing any serious work, and that should this idling continue, we were bound to go to the dogs." After thorough preparation, the two young men entered the University of Odessa, where, says Count Witte, "I worked night and day and achieved great proficiency in all my studies."

The story up to this point, though in no way extraordinary, seems characteristically Russian. First, there is great laxity and irresponsibility. Then all is changed by an unexpected and violent exertion of will.

Witte had hoped to become a professor of pure mathematics. His graduating thesis was upon "Infinitesimal Quantities," and he was planning a second thesis, this time upon an astronomical subject, when he "fell in love with an actress and lost all desire to compose dissertations." This latter episode, however, appears not to have made him lose his head. In fact, an iron will and a steady judgment are henceforth characteristic of the man. As his relatives objected to the university career on the ground that it was beneath the dignity of a person of noble birth, he thought of fitting himself to be a civil engineer and of entering the railway service in that capacity. On the advice of an influential friend, however, he dispensed with technical preparation, becoming an ordinary railroad employee and filling various humble positions. After six months, he was promoted to the office of Director of a Traffic Bureau. Later he became Minister of Ways and Communications, and then Minister of Finances.

One sees him at this stage of his career as a man naturally strong-willed, if not overbearing, his sense of superiority strengthened by his rapid advancement, by his consciousness of solid achievement, and by the circumstance that his birth and connections relieved him of the necessity of kowtowing to most persons. At the same time, as a practical man, who had to some extent "been through the mill," he soon developed a contempt for the follies of great personages and for the inefficiency and corruption of their subordinates.

All this points to the conclusion that Witte was not so much a "Liberal" in the Russian sense (or, still less, in the American sense) as an aristocrat in whom contact with real work had developed in an unusual degree the preëminently Dutch faculty of *seeing things exactly as they are*. This is the real distinction. Witte, to be sure, was an upright man; the reactionary gang, however, with all their scoundrelism, were mainly not practical men, but dreamers.

Count Witte was all his life a sincere monarchist. He worshipped the memory of Alexander III. If he had no illusions concerning Nicholas, he nevertheless respected him as Czar. All this is not, of course, to be counted against him in making up the account of his character and his services. But it is somewhat instructive to consider what manner of man it was who built the Trans-Siberian Railroad; who, despite powerful opposition, established the gold standard in Russia; who turned defeat into something like victory for his country by the peace he made at Portsmouth; who saved his country a second time by negotiating an international loan greater than any that had ever been attempted.

It is true that in 1905, he did not doubt the necessity of a parliamentary régime for the country. "In those days even the conservatives advocated a constitution. In fact there were no conservatives on the eve of October 17, 1905." He thanked God for the constitution. Yet he was rather opposed to the publication of a constitutional manifesto, and "gave much thought to the alternative plan of setting up a military dictatorship." These were alternative ways of *preventing revolution*—always the first thought. It is true that he realized fully the need of religion among the people; but it was through reform of the Orthodox church that he would have liked to see Russia regenerated. His view of the matter is practical and political: "Japan has defeated us because she believes in her God incomparably more than we do in ours. *This is just as true as the assertion that Germany owed her victory over France in 1870 to her school system.*" The writer of this evidently perceived no anti-climax. It is true that he advocated a humane treatment of the Jews, but here again he was quite practical, simply recognizing the facts.

"Emperor Alexander III asked me on one occasion: 'Is it true that you are in sympathy with the Jews?' 'The only way I can answer this question,' I replied, 'is by asking your Majesty whether you think it possible to drown all the Russian Jews in the Black Sea. To do so would, of course, be a radical solution of the problem. But if Your Majesty will recognize the right of the Jews to live, then conditions must be created which will enable them to carry on a human existence.'"

In international politics Witte favored a coalition between Russia, Germany, and France, which would dominate the whole of Europe—a sort of modern Holy Alliance. This can hardly be called an advanced conception.

The calculating shrewdness of the man is apparent in his deliberate and well-planned conciliation of American public opinion and the American press at the time of the Portsmouth conference. His cynicism is evident in his estimate of President Roosevelt: "To enhance his own popularity and to gratify his self-love as the initiator of the Conference, he wanted Peace, but a peace advantageous to the Japanese." A kind of Machiavellian spirit flashes out in him occasionally, as in his advice to Kuropatkin on the eve of the latter's departure for the East: to arrest Admiral Alexeyev, the commander in chief, and send him a prisoner to St. Petersburg. The advice was good, and no doubt

if it had turned out badly for Kuropatkin, less harm would have ensued than most people would have supposed!

The monarchistic views, the hard practicality, the somewhat arrogant spirit of the man, are not emphasized with any intent to belittle him. His services to his country were prodigious; he was no doubt "the most intelligent man in Russia," and he was also entirely honest. He was a great statesman—as great as the Russia of his time could conceivably produce. The striking fact is that even a Witte could not succeed. He failed, not because he was an ultra-liberal, an idealist, a great reformer; for he was none of these things. He failed *in spite of the fact* that he was upon the whole conservative, absolutely loyal to the Czar, hard-hearted, strong-willed to the point of brutality, able at all times to see things exactly as they were. To read the life of such a man, to appreciate the senseless attitudes he had to contend with, is to gain a new insight into the Russia of the Old Régime. Witte's views, apart from his bitter characterizations of opponents—and these are, no doubt, exact enough—are of large interest. His diagnosis of Russian public opinion at the time of the First Soviet, for example, is remarkably clear and convincing—different groups all wanting, nominally, the same thing, but wanting it for different reasons, each for a narrow or selfish motive. Here one finds the true explanation of the lack of Russian unity. But the man's whole life, the sort of man he was,—these considerations are as illuminating as any of Witte's judgments or revelations. That Witte could not save it is almost the final commentary on the Czardom. Russia, perhaps, did not deserve a Washington or a Lincoln. But Providence sent her Witte. As soon, however, as the Government felt itself safe from the immediate danger of revolution it practically banished its savior.

"I am neither a Liberal nor a Conservative," Witte was wont to say. "I am simply a man of culture. I cannot exile a man to Siberia merely because he does not think as I do, and I cannot deprive him of civil rights because he does not pray in the same church as I do.' But he was too advanced a thinker for the Russia of his day.

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THE LIFE OF WHITELAW REID. By Royal Cortissoz. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

When Whitelaw Reid became editor and proprietor of the *Xenia News*, on July 23, 1858, he was not yet twenty years of age. It is characteristic of him that he at once made this small-town newspaper a force. He had even then an uncommon power of analyzing great issues, and his work in the campaign for Lincoln "stamped him," says his biographer, "as an effective journalist." But it was not merely as an editorial writer that Reid was finding himself. He had an instinct for news, and while catering intelligently to a public that sincerely wanted to know "the best that had been thought and said in the